Hunt Mystery Girl in JFK 'Plot'

3/16/67

By LESLIE H. WHITTEN
World Journal Tribune Special

NEW ORLEANS, March 16—A mysterious Alabama girl named "Sandra Moffett" was the focus of a nation-wide search today by defense lawyers determined to show the New Orleans plot is a judiciary farce.

They believed she can tell whether Lee Harvey Oswald's alleged presence at a post-midnight "plot party" is pure myth or material truth.

The third day of a preliminary hearing for Clay L. Shaw, 54, booked as conspiring to kill President Kennedy, got under way with Perry R. Russo, 25, Shaw's star accuser, on the stand and under torrid cross-examination.

The fast-talking Russo's testimony was shaken seriously yesterday but did not tumble down. He had identified Shaw's "co-plotters" as Lee Harvey Oswald and David W. Ferrie, 49.

Shaw is on $10,000 bond pending trial.

Sandra Moffett became a vital witness when Russo testified that she was the only woman present at a party where Oswald, Ferrie and Shaw, a retired businessman, schemed to direct a "triangulation of crossfire" at President Kennedy.

Russo, a part-time student and insurance salesman, said Sandra left the party before the talk of killing the President began. But Shaw's lawyers believe she may be able to state whether the bearded, sullen beatnik that Russo said was Oswald also looked like a presidential killer to her.

The Russo version took a battering yesterday during his five hours under cross-examination by defense attorney F. Irvin Dymond.

• Why did Russo, who appears a quick-witted witness and who once took legal training, wait three years to tell of the "plot"? He said he had seen Oswald's picture at least 100 times after the assassination and had even thought he might be the man he knew as "Leon" Oswald at Ferrie's party.

• Why was he unable on the stand yesterday to identify Oswald in the famous picture snapped as avenger Jack Ruby shot him?

• Why did he testify that he had seen Oswald three or four times at Ferrie's where Russo said Oswald was Ferrie's roommate and then later say in testimony he had seen him only once?

• Why did Russo say repeatedly he had seen Oswald at the Ferrie apartment in early October when the Warren Report said "Oswald left for Mexico City on Sept. 25, 1963" and did not return to New Orleans?

• Why was Russo's memory precise on the clothes and mannerism of the "plotter" when he could not remember what his companion at the party, Sandra, was wearing or how his friend, George Peterson, was dressed? Peterson has already spoken with Garrison's men apparently without adding greatly to Russo's story. He has not testified.

• Why could he not remember exactly where Sandra lived although he had dated her several times and picked her up on two or three occasions?

Russo's face was drawn with fatigue at the end of his day on the stand. He was forced to go over old ground time and time again by defense counsel Dymond. At one time he said he had visited Ferrie's apartment 30 or 40 times and that Ferrie had visited him 10 or 15 times.

There was no testimony on what the substance of the many meetings was.

Dymond: "What made you think that testimony that there was a conspiracy might not be valuable?"

Russo: "I had never pushed myself . . . I didn't consider what I had to say would be of importance. They didn't say anything at all about Dallas . . . The Warren Commission was supposed to know what they were doing."

Russo said that even when the investigation by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison began to get publicity last month he did not come forward because "I thought every screwball in the street was giving information."

Hearst Headline Service